

business, not to extend beyond the hour of 10:45 a.m., with the time to be equally divided and Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. STEVENS. Will the Senator yield for a moment?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be 1 minute on each side prior to the votes on the three amendments this morning.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That has already been ordered.

Mr. STEVENS. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

QUALIFYING INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM AND THE STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVE

Mr. BINGAMAN. I thank the Chair. Mr. President, I wish to use a few moments of morning business to talk about and describe two amendments I have proposed to the pending legislation. I hope these are amendments that can be unanimously agreed to by all Senators. They seem to me to make eminent sense and, clearly, are in the best interest of our country and the people we represent.

The first amendment I wish to speak about is amendment No. 138. This amendment, which Senator KENNEDY is cosponsoring with me, would extend a critical Federal-State program that assists low-income Medicare beneficiaries to pay the health premiums under the Medicare Program. It uses the Medicaid Program to do that. It is a program that was enacted in 1997. It was slated to be reauthorized at the end of 2002, but, of course, Congress did not enact either Medicaid or Medicare legislation in the 107th Congress. The program was extended by the continuing resolutions that we have enacted in the last few months. It was extended until March 12 of this year.

The amendment I have offered will extend that program through September 30 of this year to give us additional time to do a more complete extension.

This program is known as the QI-1 Program. It is the Qualifying Individual Program. It is a program within Medicaid. It is a block grant payment to States to pay the Medicare Part B premium of \$58.70 per month, and it is a program that will allow States to pay that premium for individuals who have incomes of somewhere between \$887 a month and \$997 a month, or couples with an income of \$1,194 a month up to \$1,344 a month. This covers Medicare beneficiaries whose income is between 120 and 135 percent of the Federal poverty level.

This amounts to a benefit of nearly \$700 annually that many older and disabled Americans depend upon to pay

for a portion of their health care costs and items such as prescription drugs and supplemental coverage. There are well over 120,000 people nationwide who currently rely on the QI-1 Program. These 120,000 people will be hard pressed to afford Medicare coverage without this assistance.

In short, to prevent the erosion of existing low-income protections, Congress needs to extend this 5-year Federal allocation for the QI-1 Program through the remainder of this fiscal year.

According to the data of the Kaiser Family Foundation, there are over 9 million Medicare beneficiaries with incomes between 100 percent of poverty and 175 percent of poverty. Although we do not know the exact number eligible for this particular program of Medicare beneficiaries who are between 120 and 135 percent of poverty, we can estimate there are at least 1 million who are eligible for the program. As I have indicated, there are 120,000 people currently enrolled.

In my home State, for example, we have almost 1,000 New Mexicans enrolled in the QI-1 Program. Disenrolling these low-income Medicare beneficiaries would cost each and every one of them about \$700 annually. This could have a significant impact not only on their finances but on their health.

In a letter from the Medicare Rights Center, they give an example of a 69-year-old widow with severe arthritis, with hypertension, with high cholesterol, in the Nation's Capital. This woman, I refer to as Mrs. B, does not qualify for Medicaid, yet she cannot afford premiums for a Medicare HMO or Medigap plan. This QI-1 Program, which we are seeking in this amendment to extend, does cover her Part B premium of over \$700 per year. If she loses that assistance, she does not know how she can make ends meet. She already struggles to buy food, make the Medicare copayment, and purchase prescription drugs.

This is a bipartisan issue. President Bush had included QI-1 reauthorization in his fiscal year 2003 budget. Moreover, in his confirmation testimony to be the Commissioner of the FDA, Mark McClellan testified that the administration continues to support reauthorization of this program. In addition, QI-1 reauthorization was also included as part of S. 3018, the Beneficiary Access to Care and Medicare Equity Act of 2002, which was introduced by my colleagues, Senator BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY, late last year.

During each and every Senate race this past fall, candidates from both sides of the aisle promised our Nation's seniors and disabled Medicare beneficiaries improved health coverage with the addition of prescription drug coverage. While waiting for that to come about, low-income Medicare beneficiaries should not be blindsided by the loss of critically needed premium protection that the QI-1 Program provides.

I urge passage of this amendment, when we get to it, for another 6½ months. I implore my colleagues to address the issue and to permanently extend the program once that issue becomes appropriate to consider.

Mr. President, another amendment I have filed, amendment No. 126, is an amendment to provide permanent authority to operate the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. The Strategic Petroleum Reserve is the major tool the United States has to deal with the impact of a significant disruption in oil supplies. Releasing oil from the SPR, as it is referred to, in coordination with stock drawdowns with other consuming nations pursuant to the international energy agreement, can add more supply to a tight market, can reduce the possibility of price spikes, and reduce the possibility of economic havoc as the United States experienced during the Arab oil embargo.

We are currently experiencing a disruption in oil supplies from Venezuela. We face the possibility of an additional disruption if we wind up going to war with Iraq and during the aftermath of any conflict in Iraq. In this context, it should be of concern to all Senators that the current authority to draw down oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and to participate in the international energy agreement will expire on September 30 of this year.

My amendment incorporates the exact language we agreed to last fall between House and Senate conferees on H.R. 4, the comprehensive energy bill. The amendment permanently authorizes the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. It also requires filling the Reserve to 700 million or its current capacity.

While I prefer to move this legislation through the Energy Committee, I cannot guarantee we would complete our work and get this legislation to the President before September 30. Therefore, I believe the prudent thing for the Senate to do is to add this language to the omnibus appropriations bill and deal with this matter now.

Again, I see this as a bipartisan issue, one that the administration supports, one that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle support. I hope very much this amendment, as well, can be added to the bill without objection by any Senator.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FAMINE RELIEF FOR AFRICA

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I take a couple of moments to inform the Senate what I will be doing later. Yesterday, this freshman Senator from Florida brought forth an

amendment that was a \$600 million emergency famine starvation relief amendment for sub-saharan Africa. There was a good bit of drama that occurred in the well, because the vote was so razor thin in difference. The final vote on a motion to table my amendment was agreed to 48 to 46. One vote change would have had the vote 47 to 47, and the motion to table my amendment would have failed, which would have given me the opportunity to go on and try to pass the amendment.

I have spoken to the substance, the reason for this amendment. There is not a person in the Senate who has not seen sights of those children with the spindly legs, the distended bellies, the thatched hair, and the soulful eyes. A lot of it is caused by the lack of rain. This has gone in cycles.

In 1985, I had the privilege of assisting my wife who had put together the first private group, other than the NGO organizations, responding to the famine in Ethiopia. My wife had raised the money in Florida. I was then a Member of the House of Representatives and had arranged for this stretch DC8 airplane. We rode the sacks of food into Addis Ababa and went into the feeding camps to see that food was distributed. Of course, when you see those starving children, and when my wife had the experience of holding a near lifeless African child in her arms, realizing in only a matter of moments that child would expire, it makes an impression. When famine comes back to that part of the land some 17 years later, it is hard to sit still.

Although my amendment was defeated yesterday by the razor-thin margin of one vote, I am not going to sit still. I am going to offer that amendment again and, fortunately, am in a parliamentary procedure by which I can do so because a very similar amendment to the one that was defeated yesterday had been filed by me.

For those Senators on the other side of the aisle—and there were four or five yesterday—who have been deeply touched by personal experiences in Africa, having seen that famine and the ravages of it on human beings, for those five or six on the other side of the aisle, and a score more who wanted to vote for that amendment, first, I thank you profoundly for your votes. You know, each one of you, who you are. And second, I want to say that we are going to have another chance. We are going to have another chance this afternoon.

I ask Senators to examine their hearts and see if they don't think that this is the right thing to do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST

Mr. REID. Mr. President, to help move things along and to notify Democrats as to whose amendment would

come, I ask unanimous consent that the Democratic amendments—and Senator STEVENS may want to intersperse these with Republican amendments, and that is his privilege, but I ask unanimous consent that the next Democrat amendment be that of Senator KENNEDY, No. 123; Senator CLINTON, No. 89; Senator BINGAMAN, Nos. 126 and 138, and Senator CANTWELL, No. 108.

Mr. President, I also would say on each of these our members have agreed to time. But until the majority has seen the amendments, I am not going to ask time limits be established, even though we have established what our people have asked for in the way of time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? The Senator from Wyoming?

Mr. THOMAS. I think probably there is no disagreement but at this time there needs to be some more agreement from our leader, so I object for the moment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, how much time do the Democrats have left?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Two minutes forty seconds.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, all we are trying to do is move things along. We have a right to have our amendments in the order we want. If we want to move this bill along, as the two leaders want, we cannot have these foolish—I know someone told the Senator to object. I am not calling the Senator foolish—these foolish objections. I know there is nothing that can be done because there is an objection that has been raised, but it is too bad.

Democratic Senators should be aware this is the order we are going to offer amendments.

Mr. BYRD. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. REID. I am happy to yield.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, if the Senator will yield, have these priorities been established already and agreed to with Mr. STEVENS?

Mr. REID. Yes, I have talked to Senator STEVENS. I talked to him this morning in the presence of the majority leader.

Mr. BYRD. What the distinguished whip is trying to do is simply to lay the prioritization in the RECORD, so Senators will not have to wait around; they will know when their amendments are going to be called up?

Mr. REID. Absolutely right. We have a number of Senators who have been waiting since yesterday or the day before to offer amendments. This is done so they are not standing around here waiting, so there is some kind of order in the Chamber rather than people trying to get recognized.

Mr. BYRD. Perhaps, when Senator STEVENS is back on the floor, you can get that consent. I would hope so.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who seeks recognition?

The Senator from Wyoming.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE COMPETITION

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, we would like to take the remainder of the time that has been assigned to this side of the aisle to talk about an amendment that would be before us this morning, the Mikulski amendment, which has been proposed as an amendment to the bill. It has to do with the implementation of the Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act, the FAIR Act, which was passed in 1998. It basically requires all Federal agencies to itemize jobs that are classified as non-inherently governmental in nature, so there will be an opportunity for competition for those kinds of activities that the private sector, in the cases where it is appropriate, can be a competitor and can, indeed, do generally more efficiently than having it continue, as it has, with no competition.

In 2001 the FAIR Act inventory noted over 840,000 Federal jobs that are non-inherently governmental. Those are jobs that could be done by contract, that could well be done by contract. There should be opportunity for that competition to exist.

The goal, of course, of the FAIR Act is to spend taxpayers' money as efficiently as possible, to ensure the Federal Government is not without competition with the private sector.

I think most of us would like to have as much done in the private sector as we reasonably can do. This, obviously, is not all the things Government does. There are inherently governmental programs, and they will continue to be that. The goal of the FAIR Act is to spend the taxpayers' money as efficiently as possible to ensure the Federal Government does not compete with the private sector. Wherever that can be, whether it is in contracting, whether it is the kinds of things that could be better done in the private sector, that is what we are seeking to do.

President Bush's Competitive Sourcing Initiative asked the Federal agencies to conduct private sector competitions in up to 15 percent of the jobs listed in the FAIR Act inventory. Of course, that is exactly what needs to be done, to identify these roles and then to have an opportunity to put them into the private sector and let the Government compete with the private sector and do it that way. It is a pretty basic sort of philosophy and something which I think most people would agree to do.

The amendment that has been put forth was to not allow the administration to move forward with their plans. I will later offer a copy of a letter that the President has sent through his administration, saying that they are opposed to this idea, that they want to move forward.

The fact is, during the Clinton administration, after the 1998 passage of the FAIR Act, there was very little done to implement it. Now we have an administration that believes they ought to implement the law as it exists, and we want to move forward in doing that.